

with this haiku. Even if the reader has not seen the film, the third-line curveball can easily work as a rare but relatable juxtaposition.

leave your name and number the stars

Mike White

Another fine monoku that can be read in several engaging ways. The standard answering machine prompt is turned on its head and reaches cosmic proportions.

There are many other haiku that resonated with me but there is not enough space to write about them here.

Haiku 2024 ends with an afterword by Peter Yovu called *Through a Dragonfly's Wings: 27 Ways to Look at Haiku 2024*. I believe it is titled as a homage to Wallace Steven's poem *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. Yovu, in almost prose poem fashion, writes about what the haiku is and could be. Strikingly, he employs the haiku contained in *Haiku 2024* as a way to create a type of essay-haibun. The style of writing drew me in and made me introspect about the essence of haiku.

Ultimately, I would say this anthology does well to demonstrate the forward-thinking haiku of 2023 in the English-language world. ◻■

REVIEWED BY JENNY WARD ANGYAL

The Alchemy of Love by Susan Burch (Brooks Books, Taylorville, IL: 2024). 48 pages, 4" x 5.75". Perfect softbound. ISBN 978-1-929820-31-3. \$15 from brooksbookshaiku.com.

The Alchemy of Love, Susan Burch's chapbook of 40 tanka, was a winner of the 2024 High/Coo Chapbook Competition sponsored by Brooks Books. While not haiku, the poems in this volume are "high/coo"—tiny poems that capture high moments of awareness,

our playful responses to them, and the essential silence that lies between the two.

Tanka is the direct descendent of *waka*, a Japanese verse form dating back at least to the seventh century—far older than haiku—but shares the rhythm of five and seven sound units that are natural to the Japanese language. Over the following centuries, *waka* evolved into the poetry of the Heian court. The verses were often exchanged between lovers, so the expression of human love has a long and venerable history in the tanka lineage. *The Alchemy of Love* carries forward that ancient tradition, but also reflects the poetic reforms of early twentieth-century Japan. Those reforms injected fresh life into the increasingly stylized, courtly *waka* verses and transformed the genre into something new: the contemporary tanka, a succinct verse form that can address the lives, concerns, and emotional needs of modern people in many nations and languages.

In her introduction, Burch says that her the book includes “tanka on romantic love, self-love, and love of nature.” The volume is dedicated to Burch’s husband of 23 years, and many of the poems are straightforward expression of romantic love:

telling me
how much I matter—
getting lost
in the alchemy
of love

Burch’s poems are often playful or slyly humorous and this title poem is no exception, with its subtle pun on the word ‘matter’—recall that alchemy was the medieval quest to transform base matter into gold, just as love is capable of transforming lovers into their best selves.

Other poems effectively use images from the natural world to express human feeling:

at the end
of our first date
a kiss
that stripped the field
of dandelion wishes

The last two lines offer a delightful bit of hyperbole, evoking a kiss more wonderful than being granted acres of ‘dandelion wishes.’

Other tanka marry themes of romantic love with a love for the natural world, expressed in the poet’s close observation of that world and her identification with its denizens:

all the years
it took to find love
worth it—
the hopping dance
of a cedar waxwing

We can easily imagine the narrator skipping with joy in imitation of the waxwing!

Burch’s 40 tanka include images of no fewer than nine different species of birds, seven kinds of plants, and one butterfly. Some poems are pure appreciation for the other beings in our shared world, expressed with Burch’s signature light touch and occasional whimsy:

Star Trek
has nothing on them
in our tree
the intergalactic language
of catbirds

Beneath the admirable lightness of these tanka lies a serious side, revealed in (among others) the poems of 'self-love':

a blade of grass
just being green
the days
I am happy
with who I am

This deceptively simple little poem brings to mind a verse (sometimes attributed to Bashō) from the *Zenrinkushu*: "Sitting quietly, doing nothing, Spring comes, grass grows by itself." That verse and Burch's tanka exemplify the Taoist idea of *wu-wei*: being and doing with effortless spontaneity, in harmony with the unfolding of the universe. Burch seems to have an intuitive understanding of the power of poetry to help bring us to that enviable state:

for the days
I feel damaged
beyond repair
a love letter
to myself

Burch's 'love letters to herself' might include most or all of the tanka in this slender volume, which gently guide readers to the realization that genuine self-love, love of another, and love of the natural world are not, after all, separate, unrelated phenomena but parts of an intertwined whole. The following tanka hints at that truth with its unexpected yet wonderfully apt juxtaposition:

how our love
keeps growing
every year
the long spiral
of a red delicious

At its best, the love between two people spirals outward to embrace the world.

Burch's tanka bring moments of insight, playful responses, and the silence between. Even as they embody waka's ancient traditions and tanka's contemporary vitality, the poems in *The Alchemy of Love* also belong to the realm of authentic *high/coo*. □■

BRIEFLY REVIEWED BY JACOB D. SALZER

Wildflowers in Bloom (Two Autumns Press, Santa Rosa, CA: 2024). Edited by Tanya McDonald. 32 pages, 6" x 9". Paperback, saddle-stitched binding. No ISBN. U.S. copies \$10 postpaid to HPNC, c/o Jim Chessing, HPNC Books, 2886 Calais Dr., San Ramon, CA 94583-3117, and PayPal, add \$1.00 to hpncadmin@gmail.com. Overseas orders \$16.00 via PayPal. For inquiries, email Jim Chessing at jchessing@hotmail.com, subject line: HPNC Books.

This is an excellent anthology that is modest in size, featuring haiku by four poets: Jeff Hoagland, Deborah P Kolodji, Ron Moss, and Sarah Paris. The last page of *Wildflowers in Bloom* states, "This book is produced in conjunction with a reading on September 22, 2024, the thirty-fourth in the Two Autumns series of haiku readings by the Haiku Poets of Northern California." This anthology is edited by Tanya McDonald, who also wrote the introduction. McDonald highlights the important bonds that are made between poets in the haiku community and how haiku connects people. In turn, McDonald also writes, "because we are a community, we feel the loss of one of our members deeply." She then notes the shock waves that reverberated throughout our community from the unexpected passing of Debbie P Kolodji, who was described as being vibrant, good-spirited, and generous. The title "Wildflowers in Bloom" originates from one of Deborah P Kolodji's haiku: *wildflowers in bloom / when your children / take care of you*.